

stripes were indistinct and seen only when the bird flew directly away. No white was visible in the tail. The flanks were well barred, but the centre of the belly was white.

The above features are all consistent with the identification of the bird as a Pintail Snipe *G. stenura*, a species which breeds in eastern and central Siberia and normally winters in India and southeast Asia. I have also considered the possibility that it might have been a Swinhoe's Snipe *G. megala*. This long-distance migrant which breeds in central Siberia also lacks a pale trailing edge to the wing and has more barring on the flanks and more buff marking on the upperparts and upperwing coverts than a Common Snipe. Indeed, without reference to the number of tail feathers (usually 26 in Pintail Snipe and 20 in Swinhoe's) many specimens of these two Asiatic species are impossible to separate on plumage in the museum (author's pers. obs.). However, Swinhoe's Snipe tends to look bulkier and a little larger than Common Snipe in the field, and its feet do not usually project appreciably beyond the tail in flight; moreover, it is usually silent, or utters a short gruff grunt when flushed (Madge 1977 and in litt., Cramp & Simmons 1983). I am confident therefore that the Naivasha bird was not this species but a Pintail Snipe.

There are five previous recorded occurrences of the Pintail Snipe in Africa. Two were shot on Socotra late last century (Ogilvie-Grant & Forbes 1903); one was shot on the Juba River, Somalia, in March in about 1920 (van Someren 1929); one was netted, ringed and photographed at Naivasha in January 1969 (Backhurst 1969); and one to two were present at Bamburi, Mombasa, between September 1981 and January 1982 (EANHS Orn. Sub-Committee 1984). It is also of interest that four Pintail Snipe were located in eastern Saudi Arabia between October 1981 and March 1982 (Bundy 1983).

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FOUR-BANDED SANDGROUSE *PTEROCLES QUADRICINCTUS* IN NORTHWEST KENYA

The Four-banded Sandgrouse occurs across the northern tropics of Africa from the west coast eastwards approximately between latitudes 8N and 17N, to the southern Sudan and Ethiopia, and southeast to northern Uganda and northwest Kenya (Snow 1978). On the southeastern extremities of its range, records for Kenya have been restricted to a specimen collected on 5 August 1905 at "Lake

Rudolph" (National Museum collection, Nairobi), and to Jackson's (1938) mention of it breeding along the Kerio River at the end of January 1923 (several clutches found) and occurring along the upper reaches of the Turkwell River on an unspecified date. Jackson's records are reiterated by Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1957) and Britton (1980). In the course of researches associated with the Kenya bird atlas (Lewis & Pomeroy in prep.), the first recent records of this species for Kenya have emerged.

T.J. Barnley (*in litt.*) observed large numbers coming to drink at dusk at a dam at Kodich (= Koduch) (1.38N, 35.03E), West Pokot, in October 1975, and he mist-netted specimens at this locality on several occasions before and after this date. He notes (*in litt.*) that they did not seem to frequent a dam to the south of this area near Kongelai (1.28N, 35.01E), so that Kodich may be their southern limit in this area.

G. Nikolaus (*in litt.*) has recorded the species on the Kenya/Sudan border northwest of Lokichokio (4.12N, 34.21E) in June, November and December.

On 25 February 1984, while camped at Kamathia (= Kaie mothia) (4.56N, 35.19E), just south of the Kenya/Sudan border, we observed several sandgrouse flying over at dusk. There was insufficient light for specific identification but they were noted as having a large body and small wings, and a wavering flight reminiscent of a quail *Coturnix*; they lacked elongated central tail feathers and made a shrill, squeaking whistle unfamiliar to us. Several sandgrouse flushed in the stoney bushed grassland during the day had given brief, incomplete views, but appeared to have heavy, dark markings on their upperparts.

The following evening, we waited at dusk beside one of a series of waterholes formed by a line of small springs to try to observe these birds coming in to drink. At 19:00 all diurnal species had left the waterhole but no sandgrouse were present. At 19:05 sandgrouse began to arrive in parties of two to five. At first they settled about 50 m from the water but, in the next few minutes, the air was filled with their calls and wing noise and, by 19:12, there were approximately 1000 individuals on the ground, some drinking and the rest tightly congregated around the waterhole. The light was still sufficient for plumage features to be seen through binoculars and all birds examined were this species. Darkness fell in a matter of minutes and we left the waterhole at 19:20.

On the return journey to our camp, we checked an adjacent waterhole but heard only one sandgrouse. This apparent concentration of the sandgrouse on the pool that we kept under observation was possibly real, since many other species of birds had preferred it to the adjacent waters during the day. The sandgrouse appeared at the water just before dusk and many were drinking and leaving almost immediately, thus possibly accomplishing much or all of their return flight before total darkness fell. A few calls heard in the area during the following dawn were presumably of birds drinking before daybreak. This dispersal over the surrounding country throughout the hours of daylight, and movement to water only during the brief twilight periods is also noted for this species by Jackson (1938).

This species probably occurs regularly in northwest Kenya, and T.J. Barnley's and our observations indicate that it can do so in considerable numbers. The few records of its occurrence in Kenya most probably reflect the infrequency of observers in these far northwestern areas, together with the bird's crepuscular drinking habits.

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WHITE-BROWED COUCAL *CENTROPUS SUPERCILIOSUS* ROBBING NEST OF
GROSBEAK WEAVER *AMBLYOSPIZA ALBIFRONS* OF EGGS

On 11 February 1984 at 09:00 at the swamp near point 27c in Nairobi National Park, I was observing a pair of Grosbeak Weavers at their nest, situated about 2 m above the water level in reeds.

When both weavers were away from the nest a White-browed Coucal investigated it and began to tear it apart. It gained entry for its head (not through the weavers' entry hole) and removed an egg, which it took below into the reeds. Five minutes later it returned and, after tearing away part of the nest, removed a second egg, again taking it in its beak into the reeds below the nest. After a further five minutes it returned to the nest, whereupon the female Grosbeak Weaver returned. The female weaver showed no aggression but the coucal left the scene. After inspecting the nest the weaver left, and had not returned half an hour later.

From my observations it would seem that the coucal possibly ate the eggs. I can find no reference to such activity in the literature at my disposal, which is considerable.

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HINDE'S PIED BABBLER *TURDOIDES HINDEI* SOUTH OF MACHAKOS, KENYA

Hinde's Pied Babbler is a little known species endemic to the eastern and southeastern periphery of the central Kenya highlands. It has been the subject of much comment, admirably summarized by Plumb (1979) - hereafter quoted as 'Plumb' - with reference, amongst other things, to its apparently radical contraction of range during this century. A record from a locality where it has been considered extinct is thus significant.

Early in the morning of 27 November 1983, while collecting data for the Kenya bird atlas scheme (Lewis & Pomeroy in prep.), I located a group of these babblers on Potha ranch (1.35S, 37.14E), about 8 km south of Machakos, Kenya. The party of at least five birds was in and around the thickets along a narrow wooded stream valley, and the birds had moved a few hundred metres along this dry watercourse when they were seen by participants in an EANHSS excursion about three hours later.

The watercourse is a tributary of the Ikiwe River, which ultimately flows into the Athi; Plumb notes other localities for this species associated with the headwaters of the Athi. The habitat resembles the second type noted by Plumb for the species in the Embu District, i.e. bushy stream gullies in quite dry and open woodland. The individuals in the group had similar plumage, with no obvious albinism. Their behaviour was very similar to Plumb's descriptions: a) they frequented the dense thickets on the watercourse's edge where, when